

H. CARING FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY ABUSE

1. Pastoral Care for the Victim/Survivor and their Family

Abuse is traumatic for those who are victims and their family members. It destroys the essential basis of trust and safety, especially where the perpetrator is a parent or a trusted church member. Abuse all too commonly breaks up families, and shatters beliefs about Christian conduct and human behaviour. These situations are never without pain and suffering by a child or adult at risk. They significantly challenge our church family in coming to terms with the fact that a professed Christian, and church member, has the capacity to abuse a child or vulnerable adult.

Children may be abused by children or adults who are not family members, but who are known by the child and often the child's family. The abuse inflicted is varied but often sexual or exploitative of a vulnerable person. Whatever has happened to a child or adult, their basic needs as an individual or family remain and they should continue to receive support from our church family.

Pastoral care for the victim/survivor and his/her family may include continued contact, prayer support, help to find legal advice, and accompaniment to court hearings. The church should ensure that:

- It does not become involved with possible inter-family disputes but should always focus on the needs of the victim as a priority.
- It works hard to maintain those links that the child or adult at risk has with the church so that their life within the church remains as normal as possible.

Recognising the confidential nature of the information available to the members of a child/adult protection conference, the pastor should seek an interview with the identified social worker to establish what risk the alleged perpetrator poses to the victim and others when they attend church-based activities.

2. Pastoral Care for the Alleged Perpetrator

During the difficult period of investigation following an allegation of sexual or other form of abuse, the church should arrange appropriate support for the alleged perpetrator, who is a church member, without compromising the position of the victim/survivor, their family or the church.

- a) Pastoral care for alleged perpetrators may include continued contact, prayer support, help to find legal advice, and accompaniment to court hearings. It is unlikely that the same person would be able to provide support to meet the conflicting needs of the various parties, i.e. victim/survivor, victim's family, alleged perpetrator. The church may find it helpful if one person is responsible for dealing with the authorities, while another offers support to the victim and his/her family, and a further person gives pastoral care to the alleged perpetrator.
- b) Pastoral care for an alleged perpetrator must not be given at the expense of the victim, the victim's family, or justice. The victim/survivor should not sense that the church is in collusion with or taking the side of the alleged perpetrator.

3. Agreement of Care

For individuals whose history or behaviour pose a risk to children or adults at risk, an Agreement of Care must be completed. This would serve as a measure of protection for others from further or future concern. (See Appendix 12: Agreement of Care-taking, p.30).

4. Pastoral Care of Known Abusers

The local pastor and/or elder should:

- Talk to the offender's Probation Officer who should know the person and be able to advise on management.
- Meet with the offender and the church elders and lay out the boundaries that the offender will be expected to keep. Explain what support the church will give. Get the offender to sign an Agreement of Care form. While this sounds formal it helps in dealing with the potential manipulative ways of the sex offender, which might pose a risk (see Appendix 12: Agreement of Care, p.30).
- Inform key people, (elders, the Sabbath School leader, Youth leader, Adventurer and Pathfinder leaders, etc.) for the events that the offender is attending, that the individual should have no contact with children or young people. This is always on a 'need to know' basis. Offenders must never be on their own with children or adults at risk, to whom they pose a threat.

- Inform the offender that a failure to keep to these conditions may lead to him/her being barred from attending the church, and in such circumstances the church leadership may choose to inform the statutory agencies (Probation and Social Services) and any other relevant organisation.
- Provide the Conference/Mission DSL with the details of the offender along with a copy of the completed Agreement of Care (see Appendix 12).

5. Pastoral Care for Employed Workers

Pastoral work with children, young people and adults in the aftermath of an incident of child or adult abuse will be extremely stressful. As the main burden of this work will inevitably fall upon the shoulders of the employee, they should be provided with a counsellor while they are working in this specialised area. The employee should not feel guilty in accepting the services of a counsellor, but should see it as a necessary support for them to remain objective while working in a highly emotional and stressful situation.